



One Marine's Regret

By Cpl. J.J. Fulghum

A few months ago, my friend and I were driving to the mall along Dale Boulevard in Woodbridge, Va., in my brand new 1999 SUV when I decided to change lanes. I quickly checked my blind spot and saw the lane was clear. I hit my turn signal and began to move into the right lane when a small car appeared out of what seemed to be nowhere.

My friend yelled, “Watch out,” and I abruptly returned to my lane. My lane-change startled the lady in the small car, and she lost control. She swerved off the road and then back on, hitting my SUV in the right-rear, which caused us to flip several times.

I can remember the first flip; after that, everything got hazy until I picked myself up off the pavement about 30 feet from my totaled truck. Most of my belongings were scattered on the road, along with the shattered glass and pieces of my SUV.

I could hear my friend crying on the other side of the truck. I went around the vehicle and saw what will haunt me for the rest of my days. My friend was sitting on the curb with an off-duty firefighter who had stopped to help. He was holding my friend’s knee, cutting off the circulation to her bleeding foot.

I thought I had been driving safely. I was going the speed limit, checked my blind spot, and used my turn

signals. But, I overlooked one thing: seatbelts. Neither of us was wearing them, and we were ejected. You ask, “How in the world could you have forgotten seatbelts?” I ask myself that same question everyday. I had missed my opportunity to help her—I didn’t make her wear her seatbelt. Now, the only help I can offer is my prayers. She was flown to a nearby hospital and was put in intensive care. She remained hospitalized for over a month.

To this day, my friend is undergoing repeated surgeries and therapy to repair her foot. Soon, she will be walking again. I, on the other hand, miraculously made it through the wreck un-scarred physically—how, I’ll never know. On the inside, however, I have a pain that won’t go away, a scar I’m sure will never heal; I hurt my friend. She had dreams of becoming a studio dancer, but for now, I took those dreams away.

Remember this: As you put on your seatbelt today, not only are you following the law and a Marine Corps order, but you’re securing your life, your health and your dreams. If you’re driving and you have passengers, think about securing theirs, too. They might not appreciate it at the time, but believe me, if something happens, their family and friends will—and so will you. 🇺🇸

Cpl. Fulghum wrote this story before leaving the Corps. He was stationed at HMX-1 in Quantico.